

The Miracle-Making Icon of the Mother of God Tikhvinskaya - Its History and Ethics of Conservation

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Pict. 1 The Dormition Cathedral. 16th c. Tikhvin monastery

Conservation and restoration procedure undertaken on the certain objects like actual relics or shrine always arise specific ethical problems. In some cases they are more important than technical aspects of conservation. Conservators must take in the consideration both its spiritual signification as an indivisible unity and religious attitude. Conservators met such case during treatment of the door wings of the icon case in which the icon of the Mother of God “Tikhvinskaya” is set.

The image of The Mother of God Hodehetria called Tikhvinskaya belongs to the mostly venerated icons in Russian history. Its iconography derives from the Byzantine icon in the Blachernai cathedral in Constantinople like all earliest icons of the Virgin (Theotokos) in the country. The prototype initially was kept in Jerusalem. In the 5th century it was taken by empress Eudoxia to Constantinople, where the icon was put into especially erected church of Blachernai. In 1383, 70 years before the fall of Constantinople, the icon (its replica) miraculously flown to Russia and appeared to fishers at the Ladoga lake, where some years later the Tikhvinsky monastery was established with the Dormition cathedral built for the icon. The cathedral used to be rebuilt and redone several times in the course of time: in 1515, 1560th, in 1620th, then in the 18-19th centuries.



Pict 2. The icon of the Tikhvinskaya Theotokos in the Dormition Cathedral

For almost six hundred years the icon resided at the Dormition cathedral of the monastery. After the Revolution new regime began a long-term period of repressions against religion. The monastery and its

churches were closed and destroyed. What has happened with the holy icon in 1920th is not actually known, but in fact it was kept in the cathedral. We just know that the riza of 1836, being on the icon was



Pict 3. The icon of Mother of God Tikhvinskaya. 14th c. Tikhvin monastery

removed from the icon. The present riza was executed in 1718.

Due to all treatments undertaken in the cathedral during the course of the time the holy image also used to be renovated several times and the icon was installed into special icon case with door wings and a shelter above,

commissioned by

the Tikhvin citizen Maxim Kalashnikov in the 18th century. The icon stayed at the South-West column of the cathedral until 1941. In March 1942 the icon was taken by Germans firstly to Pskov, then in 1944 to Riga, where it was received by the Orthodox community. Bishop John (Garklavs) of Riga, who later became Archbishop of Chicago and Minneapolis in the USA. At the days when Soviet army came to Riga, the icon was hidden in the Trinity-Sergius Women`s monastery for a short period, from where was taken into exile. Priest Nickolas Vieglais escorted by Germans took the Tikhvin icon to Danzig, Poland, and then To Germany, at last in 1949 brought to USA. Bishop John in



Pict 4. Riza (revetment) of the Tikhvinskaya icon. 19th c



Pict 5. Archangel Michael. Left door-wing of the Tikhvinskaya icon. 18th c. Obverse



Pict 6. Mother of God Tikhvinskaya. 16th c. Left door-wing. Reverse

1949 was designated as Bishop of Detroit and Cleveland and the icon was resided at the Protection of the Virgin cathedral in New York City and later at the Trinity cathedral in Chicago. Just recently in 2004 the icon has been returned back to its historical place.

There is no exact date of the Tikvin icon, the legend derives it to Apostle Saint Luke himself, but more reasonable date was made by restorer Grigori Chirikov, who attributed it to the 14th century. Chirikov undertook a course of restoration in 1910, but before him the icon was treated by Gerasim Kremlev in 1636 and by Durakov in 1718. Chirikov removed three layers of overpaintings and did some restoration.

There is no documents confirming dates and names concerning installation of the icon case and its door wings, except dedicatory lettering on the wing doors. It is known that during the way of the icon's exile from Tikhvin they were also taken to Pskov, where they seem to have been separated from the icon. The wings of the icon case were kept in the Pskov Holy Trinity cathedral since 1941 until 2004. They were absolutely forgotten because of their late origin. Finally, when the icon was given back to Russia, all parts have met each other again in the Tikhvin monastery.

The icon itself, because of its tremendous spiritual and historical value, is not expertized nor restored since 1910. Now the door wings attract an attention of specialists, because they were neglected so long time.

They are two-side wings with depictions of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel on the obverse covered with silver revetments. On the reverse are the icons with Saint Nickolas and the smaller copy of the Tikhvinskaya Virgin, also with silver revetments. Wings needed urgent conservation caused by dangerous state of preservation. The research and conservation work were undertaken in the Academy of Fine Arts, Saint-Petersburg.



Pict 7. Archangel Gabriel. Right door-wing of the Tikhvinskaya icon. 18th c. Obverse

The complex in its actual appearance combines valuable evidences of religious veneration, donations of the members of the Royal family, restoration. Crucial feature of such objects, which must stand to reason, is that memorable values are more important than artistic ones. We can not treat it as just an art work. Actually, any icon is not “art” or “painting”, at least not only. The theological concept of the icon, was formulated in the Nicene decree and then in the words of John of Damascus: “the honour shown to the image is transferred to the prototype, and whoever honours an image honours the person represented by it”.ⁱ

Therefore, a “shown honour” to the icon brought to live a certain physical form of door wings. These doors, accepted as an object, combine different materials, different arts and crafts. It is not a creation of a certain master, it summarizes, or we can say, embodies several “shown honours” distanced in the time. The complex includes: the silver revetment with sculptured in high relief figures of Archangels Michael on the left wing obverse and Gabriel on the right wing obverse. There are icons with Saint Nickolas (left) and with Theotokos Tikhvinskaya (right), mounted into doors on their reverse. Both are covered with the revetments, arranged by riza pieces dated to different time from 16th to 19th centuries. Icons are surrounded with gilt silver and bronze framing with devotional metal plates. According to the style, technique and information on the devotional plates wings used to be commissioned by the Emperor Paul I (1754-1801) in the memory of his visit on 9 June 1798 with his wife Maria Fedorovna and their sons Alexander (1777-1825) and Constantine (1779-1831). By this commission Emperor Paul also wanted to memorize previous visits of his ancestors: Empress Elisabeth (1709-1761), daughter of Peter the Great on 3 February 1747, and his parents Peter III (1728-1762) and Catherine II the Great (1729-1796). On the Archangel Michael wing: about visit of Peter III and his wife; below – about their

sons Grand Dukes Alexander and Constantine. On the Archangel Gabriel: about visit of Empress Elisabeth; below – about Emperor Paul and Maria.

Main metalwork, including Archangels and the niello frames and plates, was executed by Moscow silversmith in 1798 (stamps – A.B. BM 1798 – Vihlyaev Alexei, 1781-1809).

Both doors also include icons with painted images – Archangels in full length, seems from early 18th century, heavy restored in 1908-



Pict 8. Saint Nickolas. 16-17th c. Right door-wing. Reverse



Pict 9. Icon with Archangel Michael. 18-19th c. Before conservation.



Pict 11. Icon with Archangel Gabriel. 18-19th c. Before conservation

Pict 12. Icon with Archangel Gabriel. After restoration

1910 by Grigory Chirikov, then damaged and coarser renovated several times later in the 20th century. On their reverse were mounted two smaller icons – Saint Nickolas dated to the 17th century and Mother of God Tikhvinskaya dated to the 16th century. Both were restored also by Grigory Chirikov. The fact of their restoration is confirmed by the text on plates.ⁱⁱ



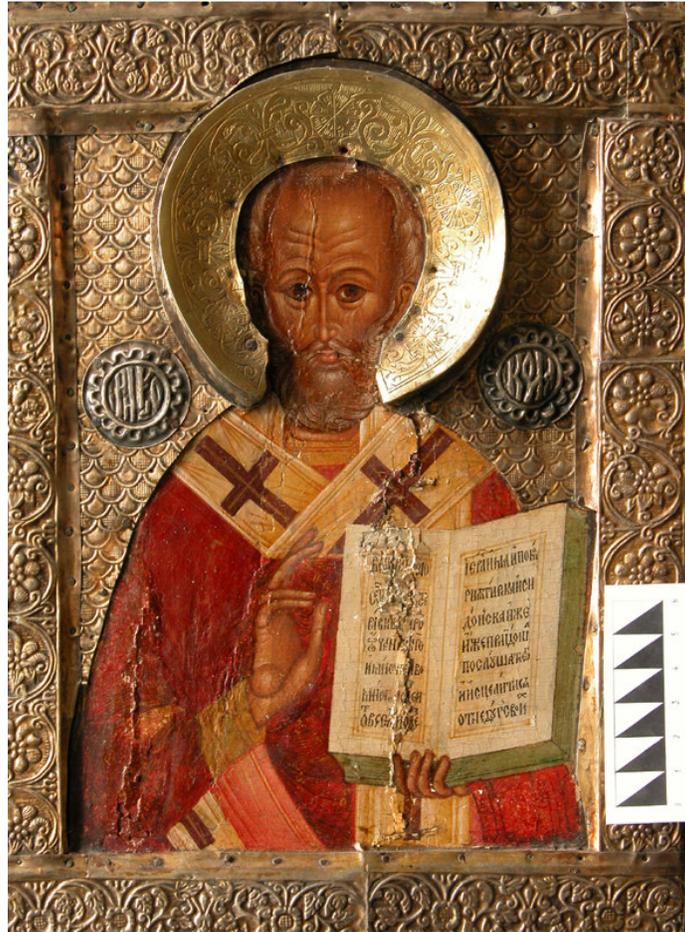
Pict 13. Icon with Theotokos. 16th c. Fragment

Actually, this historical description just emphasizes the ethical aspects of the conservation and restoration of the shrine. All interventions are documented. Moreover, the conservation itself was commissioned by private donator Vadim Zimaev, who desired to gild metal revetment of both

wings. Therefore the conservation treatment should consider also his intention. This religious object exists in the specific environment of the actual Orthodox Church, what determined to apply particular conservation methodology. So, this case shows that only personal professional responsibility of a conservator is able to put into balance such contradictory requirements. Due to all these circumstances the treatment was done on the basis of the selective methodology. It means that some coarse parts of earlier renovation were removed while some others, dated to the Chirikov's intervention, were preserved. The icon painting was not only consolidated but also restored in some missed parts. It was impossible just to fix everything damaged or to remove everything what is not "original". The complex as a unity has no certain author, no certain date, it has definite dates just for its parts.



Pict 10. Icon with Archangel Michael. After restoration.



Pict 14. Icon with Saint Nickolas. 16-17th c. Fragment

Moreover, it is not “historical value” because it is still “actual value” with continues religious activity.

This case provokes not only practical questions, but also more theoretical ones. What is “historical value”? Is it anything, like physical object, given to us, in other words – something “finished”, something “closed”? The recent Conservation Dictionary treats the term “object” as “an artifact which is considered to have historic, scientific or cultural significance” or “value that an individual or a society places on an object”. According to the Professional Code a conservator must protect an object in its values. Anything added or inserted must be indicated as a certain conservation invasion. It definitely treats an “object” as an accomplished, belonging to the past.

But what shall we do with objects which are inside the flow of the religious life. If people could do donation to an icon during centuries, why they can not do it now? A conservator is nor able to stop this practice, at least in Russia. We just can to minimize it by trying to protect and preserve different invasions as a historical value according to the Professional Code of Ethics.

ⁱ Sixten Ringbom. Icon to Narrative. The Rise of the Dramatic Close-Up in Fifteenth-Century Devotional Painting.// *Acta Academiae Aboensis, ser.A Humaniora*, Vol.31, Nr.2. Abo Academi, Abo, 1965, p. 12.

ⁱⁱ «Сия чудотворная икона Тихвинской Божией Матери по указу Святейшего Правительствующего Синода от 30 сентября 1908 года за № 12322 реставрирована от многовековых наслоений красок и огустевшей пыли безусловно вредных для самой иконописи. Реставрацию проводил по назначению Комитета попечительства о русской иконописи» -. На створке с врезком иконы св. Николы: «Московский иконописец реставратор Григорий Осипович Чириков в алтарь Покровского храма под постоянным наблюдением иеромонаха Ефрема и при участии некоторых из старшей братии с 22 мая по 24 июня 1910 года при настоятеле архимандрите Иоанникии». Icon painter and restorer Grigori Osipovitch Chirikov (1882-1936) was one of the most famous masters of his time.